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**Summary record of the 61st meeting**
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 10 May 2001, at 10 a.m.

*Chairman:* Mr. Rosenthal ..... (Guatemala)
*Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions*: Mr. Mselle

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.*

**Agenda item 115: Financial reports and audited financial statements, and reports of the Board of Auditors** (*continued*) (A/55/5 (Vol. II), A/55/380/Add.2 and A/55/878)

1. **Mr. Nesser** (Sweden), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that the report of the Board of Auditors on United Nations peacekeeping operations (A/55/5 (Vol. II)) provided Member States with a valuable insight into the functioning and management of peacekeeping operations, and that the European Union concurred with the recommendations made therein. He expressed regret that the report had been issued some 14 weeks after its signature by the Board on 31 January 2001. With the cost of peacekeeping likely to spiral over the next budget cycle, Member States were required to scrutinize peacekeeping budgets and financial statements ever more thoroughly. They were also increasingly required to extend that scrutiny to the management of peacekeeping, both at Headquarters and in the field. The late issuance of documentation prevented Member States from performing that task effectively. He requested the Secretariat to take note of those concerns and to ensure that, in future, the Board's report was issued in early April.

2. The European Union considered audit to be an essential function, particularly in evaluating management processes and monitoring the implementation of recommendations, and it saw the resident auditors as facilitators in that regard. He noted with satisfaction that there were no significant outstanding matters with respect to the Board's report for the financial period ending 30 June 1998. However, the Board had had to remind the Administration to ensure full implementation of some of the recommendations made in its report for the financial period ending 30 June 1999. He trusted that the Administration would act on those reminders expeditiously.

3. The Board's comments were based on its examination of issues at a number of missions but could well be more broadly applicable. All too often the Board reported problems that could have serious consequences for the control and management of the Organization's resources and instances of non-compliance with rules and regulations or guidelines that could undermine the implementation of a mission's mandate. Training had an important role to play in addressing that situation. The European Union recognized the improvements made in training and the value added to that function by the United Nations Logistics Base at Brindisi. It noted, however, that, in a number of cases, training had taken place after staff had taken up postings to missions and that, in other cases, staff had been trained but had not been available for mission service. Proper and timely training could act as an incentive to mobility or recruitment, which could go some way to alleviating the high vacancy rates in certain missions. It was therefore incumbent on management to use the performance appraisal system to identify training requirements of staff. The European Union had taken note, in that connection, of the comments and recommendations contained in the related report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (A/55/878).

4. In order to facilitate assessment of the management of peacekeeping missions, each mission should set objectives in the area of administration, which could be reflected in its budget submission. The objectives could either flow from those set at Headquarters on the basis of the recommendations made by the Board, or be set individually at missions. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations could monitor the attainment of the objectives and report thereon to the General Assembly in the relevant financial performance reports. Missions, for their part, should have an opportunity to report on how vacancies affected the attainment of their objectives.

5. He had taken note of the points raised regarding the accrual of claims, particularly those verified as valid and made in respect of services already rendered, and looked forward to discussing the issue further in informal consultations.

6. **Ms. Merchant** (Norway) expressed regret at the late issuance of the report of the Board of Auditors, which should have been made available well in advance of the second part of the resumed fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly, since, in order for Member States to assume their leading role in oversight, they must be able to devote adequate time to the issue.

7. Her delegation concurred with the Advisory Committee that the first report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the recommendations of the

Board of Auditors concerning United Nations peacekeeping operations for the financial period ending 30 June 2000 (A/55/380/Add.2) should have included information on the progress achieved, as well as the results and changes produced by implementing those recommendations or by the corrective measures taken in response. The Administration's efforts to reduce the non-accrual of certified claims were most welcome. With the introduction of the new method of reimbursement for contingent-owned equipment the problem would not recur, and it was to be hoped that the outstanding contingent liabilities of $39.9 million would be dealt with as soon as possible.

8. Her delegation welcomed the Board's comments and recommendations in paragraphs 21 and 22 of its report regarding the need to avoid setting off accounts payable against accounts receivable, and it agreed with the Advisory Committee that it was necessary to ensure that the practice was not extended to other United Nations operations. It also fully supported the Board's recommendation in paragraph 27 of its report that the Administration should implement procedures to ensure that rule 104.1 of the Financial Regulations and Rules of the United Nations, which required obligations to be supported by appropriate obligating documents, was adhered to and also to ensure that obligations were raised in the correct financial period against the appropriate budgeted amounts, since raising obligations without valid supporting documentation created a potential for fraud. She expressed satisfaction at the general improvement in the recoverability of staff debts, noting that the debts identified were not material, and urged the Administration to pursue its efforts to recover them.

9. Her delegation endorsed the Advisory Committee's request for a comprehensive assessment, in the context of the next audit, of all aspects of the implementation of the new arrangements for reimbursement of contingent-owned equipment, preferably at selected representative missions. It also supported the invitation to the Board to inquire about the adequacy and effectiveness of resident auditors. The Board's recommendation in paragraph 59 of its report was most welcome, and it was to be hoped that the changes recommended would eliminate the delays in processing claims in respect of contingent-owned equipment. Her delegation noted that the Office of Internal Oversight Services had recently conducted an evaluation of the field assets control system and looked forward to the issuance of a report by the Secretary-General thereon.

10. Regarding the Board's recommendation in paragraph 95 of its report that the Administration should undertake a review of current resources available to meet peacekeeping procurement needs, establish more systems contracts and encourage procurement planning, she said that her delegation agreed with the Advisory Committee that it would be premature for the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to establish a fully resourced peacekeeping section dedicated to its procurement requirements.

11. **Mr. Orr** (Canada), speaking also on behalf of Australia and New Zealand, expressed disappointment at the late issuance of the report of the Board of Auditors. Referring to table 3, which showed available cash versus liabilities as at 30 June 2000, he noted that some 30 missions were listed, of which only 12 were active. The accounts of many completed peacekeeping operations remained open because of the failure of some Member States to pay their assessed contributions. He called on all Member States to honour their obligation under the Charter to pay their full assessed contributions to all peacekeeping operations and asked what efforts had been made by the Secretariat to collect those long overdue debts.

12. His delegation would like to know why some $20.1 million remained in the account of the United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) when liabilities were virtually zero. Where the accounts of completed peacekeeping operations had cash exceeding liabilities, those liabilities should be discharged, the accounts closed and the balances returned to Member States. In 1999, cash in hand had been equivalent to almost one full year's peacekeeping expenditures, whereas, in 2000, it had been equivalent to only eight months' expenditures. He therefore wished to know what constituted an appropriate level of cash in hand.

13. The reduction in the amount of liabilities not properly disclosed in the financial statements was most welcome, but it was to be hoped that the Board would not have to draw the attention of the Committee to the practice in future.

14. The management shortcomings identified by the Board must be addressed systematically. However, there was also a need to prevent those problems from recurring and to ensure that new problems did not arise. In order to achieve that goal, the quality of the

civilian component of peacekeeping missions must be improved. Currently, confusing recruitment procedures, lack of pre-mission training and short-term contracts were resulting in high vacancy rates and an unmotivated field staff. His delegation strongly supported the Advisory Committee's recommendations aimed at addressing that situation. The implementation of those recommendations, along with the Secretary-General's human resources management reforms, would help to produce a more effective and motivated civilian component in peacekeeping missions.

15. **Mr. Repasch** (United States of America) said that an important component of effective oversight was the appropriate and timely review by the intergovernmental bodies of the reports of the oversight organs. He therefore regretted the late issuance of the report of the Board of Auditors. It was to be hoped that the Committee would be able to give closer consideration to the Board's findings and recommendations when it examined the proposed budgets of the various missions in informal consultations.

16. Regarding the Board's findings, he urged the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to avoid, in future, the duplication of the function of comparison of the verification reports received in respect of contingent-owned equipment with the memoranda of understanding. Noting that, for all 10 closed procurement files tested by the Board, vendor-performance evaluations had been outstanding, he said that the Department must adhere to the relevant regulations and rules. He sought further clarification concerning the finding that two missions had raised miscellaneous obligating documents totalling approximately $6.4 million for transportation services and purchase of goods and services in contravention of the United Nations Finance Manual. Lastly, he expressed concern that, as at 8 November 2000, some 20 per cent of posts in missions had been vacant. He wished to know what measures had been taken to address that situation.

17. **Mr. Farid** (Saudi Arabia) said that his delegation supported the Advisory Committee's recommendation (A/55/878, para. 16) that steps must be taken to ensure that adequate qualified staff were assigned, trained and retained to perform procurement-related activities and tasks in field missions. It also endorsed the Board's recommendation in paragraph 80 of its report regarding the updating of the field assets control system.

18. **Ms. Benary** (Assistant Secretary of the Committee) said, in response to the comments made by members of the Committee concerning the late issuance of the report of the Board of Auditors, that she had been informed by the Chief of the Central Planning and Coordination Service that the report had been submitted in a timely manner. However, longer, more complicated manuscripts were more difficult to process than shorter, simpler jobs. In addition, the Service had had to process, at the same time, the pre-session and in-session documentation required by the Fifth Committee during the first part of the resumed fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly and the pre-session documentation required by the Committee during the second part of the resumed fifty-fifth session. The bulk of that documentation had been issued quite expeditiously. The Service was, of course, aware of the importance of the report of the Board of Auditors and the problems that delegations encountered because of the late issuance of documentation.

19. **Mr. Bhana** (Director of External Audit of the Republic of South Africa) said, regarding the liabilities of some $39.9 million not accrued for in the accounts of the United Nations peacekeeping operations, that the Board had always taken the position that, once claims submitted in respect of services already received by the Organization were verified as being valid by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, a valid liability was created. The Board had chosen not to qualify its opinion of the financial statements of the United Nations peacekeeping operations because the Secretariat had followed procedures broadly in line with the financial regulations and had at least disclosed the $39.9 million of contingent liabilities in the notes to the financial statements. Also, the Board had taken into account the Secretariat's efforts to reduce the level of unaccrued liabilities. Moreover, the liabilities in question were in respect of claims received from troop-contributing countries under the old system for reimbursement of contingent-owned equipment, which had since been significantly enhanced, and the Board expected that such unaccrued liabilities would be phased out over the next few financial periods.

20. Concerning the late issuance of the Board's report, he said that the Board always endeavoured to ensure timely reporting. Indeed, the report had been signed on 31 January 2001 and transmitted to the Secretariat in early February.

21. The Board shared the view that objective-setting was an important element of proper operational management and would bear the issue in mind in forthcoming audits. It had noted the concern expressed by a number of delegations about the management of non-expendable equipment and concurred with the view that, with the field assets control system, better results could be achieved. The Board had been pleased to note that managers in a number of missions were already implementing measures aimed at enhancing control of the equipment in their custody. He agreed that the Board's finding that two missions had raised miscellaneous obligating documents for transportation services and purchase of goods and services, in contravention of the United Nations Finance Manual, was a very serious one.

22. Lastly, the Board concurred with the Advisory Committee that the review of current resources available to meet peacekeeping procurement needs should take place in the context of the comprehensive review of procurement.

23. **Mr. Karia** (Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Accounts) said that the Secretariat had taken note of the Committee's concerns regarding the $39.9 million disclosed as contingent liabilities for the period ending 30 June 2000. The Advisory Committee and the Board of Auditors had confirmed that the actions taken by the Administration on that matter were in accordance with the Financial Regulations and Rules of the United Nations.

24. Generally speaking, the Administration had followed accrual basis accounting in accordance with United Nations accounting standards; in the case in question, however, the General Assembly had not specifically authorized the funds needed to record the expenditures. Nevertheless, the amount had been disclosed under contingent liabilities in the notes to the financial statements, which were an integral part thereof.

25. In the context of the final performance reports for the United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM) and the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR), the Administration would submit proposals to the General Assembly on funding requirements to cover the pending claims of troop-contributing countries. It had followed the same procedure in the case of the United Nations Peace Forces (UNPF) and, upon approval of the additional funding by the General Assembly, the contingent liability disclosed in the financial statements of peacekeeping for the period ending 30 June 1999 had been reduced by approximately 73 per cent.

26. The Administration made every effort to collect unpaid contributions; it issued a report on the matter and sent reminders to Member States, and the Under-Secretary-General for Management had addressed the Committee on numerous occasions regarding the financial status of the Administration's operations with respect to the regular budget and peacekeeping.

27. The level of cash in hand in relation to monthly peacekeeping expenditures varied from year to year and could be affected by factors such as the amount of annual assessments and the number and nature of current peacekeeping operations. For example, there had been several active operations in 2000, including the United Nations Transitional Mission in East Timor (UNTAET), the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) and the United Nations Operation in the Congo (MONUC); consequently, there had been less cash available during that year than in 1999.

28. He would reserve his replies to other questions for the informal consultations.

29. **Mr. Orr** (Canada) said that he was not satisfied with the Secretariat's explanation of the delay in issuance of the report of the Board of Auditors. As in previous years, although the document had been submitted on time, it had not been issued until the beginning of the resumed session and thus could not be properly discussed. He suggested that, in its consideration of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003, the Committee should examine the manner in which the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services established priorities for the processing of documents and should consider whether certain documents that could not be issued in a timely manner should be outsourced.

**Agenda item 116: Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations** (*continued*) (A/55/857 and Add.1)

**Agenda item 123: Human resources management** (*continued*)

*Report of the Joint Inspection Unit on the delegation of authority for management of human and financial resources in the United Nations Secretariat*

30. **Mr. Münch** (Joint Inspection Unit), introducing the report of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) on the delegation of authority for management of human and financial resources in the United Nations Secretariat (JIU/REP/2000/6) (A/55/857), said that JIU strongly supported the Secretary-General's efforts to enhance the delegation of authority as part of his overall reform package and commended the Secretariat for its achievements in that area. However, he regretted the undue delay in processing the report and in submission of the Secretary-General's comments thereon (A/55/857/Add.1) and hoped that in future, every effort would be made to ensure a more expeditious transmission of comments.

31. The primary message of the report, as stated in recommendation 1, was that delegation of authority should follow a comprehensive overall plan of action based on a systematically developed concept.

32. With respect to recommendation 2, paragraph 60 of the report stated that clear policies for the promulgation of administrative issuances were not always observed. He was puzzled by the comment that that statement was not accompanied by specific examples and that the procedures set out for the promulgation of administrative instructions, their abolishment and/or amendment were scrupulously followed (A/55/857/Add.1, para. 9) since paragraphs 61 to 66 of the report listed a number of specific examples where those procedures had not been followed. Staff members should have no difficulty in finding the administrative issuances that they needed and should not have to consider the possibility that portions of those documents had not yet entered into force.

33. He welcomed the Secretary-General's acceptance of recommendations 3, 4 and 5. Promulgation of the Financial Regulations and Rules in the form of Secretary-General's bulletins was long overdue; it was essential to incorporate without delay the amendments to the Regulations which had been approved by the General Assembly and to review cases where issuances contradicted each other or where lower-level issuances contradicted higher-level ones, particularly in the area of receipt and custody of funds.

34. With respect to recommendation 6, he was surprised at the statement in paragraph 18 of the comments that delegation of authority should be made generic through the issuance of bulletins or instructions and that, consequently, proper delegation of authority existed within the Secretariat. It was not only heads of departments or offices and programme managers who exercised delegated authority; many others were involved, and the use of individual delegation orders would help prevent confusion. However, he noted that paragraph 19 of the comments recognized the need for personalized instructions, directions and assistance in respect of the delegation of financial management authority.

35. Recommendation 7 had nothing to do with the existence of "proper rules on delegation of authority", mentioned in paragraph 21 of the comments. Interviews with senior officials had revealed that newly-appointed heads of departments and programme managers were not always given proper training in the intricacies of United Nations administrative and management standards; even when the regulations, rules and instructions were perfectly drafted, knowledge of a complex system was not acquired automatically.

36. He noted with appreciation the Secretary-General's acceptance of recommendation 8 and the additional information provided in paragraphs 23 and 24 of the comments; with regard to recommendation 9, he stressed that the necessary comprehensive approach must include all managerial areas, not merely human resources management.

37. Lastly, while welcoming the Secretary-General's general acceptance of recommendation 10, he did not agree that the latter gave the impression that no system of accountability currently existed; the report included recognition of and praise for the Secretariat's achievements in that area and merely indicated areas in which further improvement was called for.

38. **Ms. Salim** (Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management) introduced the

Secretary-General's comments on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit (A/55/857/Add.1). She was pleased that the inspectors supported the Secretary-General's efforts with regard to the delegation of authority and that many of the recommendations corresponded to initiatives that had, in fact, been taken in the interim. In that regard, she drew attention to the reports of the Secretary-General on accountability and responsibility (A/55/270 and human resources management reform (A/55/253 and Corr.1).

39. In recommendation 6, JIU proposed the promulgation of individual delegation orders. The Secretary-General believed that while further improvement was possible, the existing two-tier mechanism for delegation of authority at the organizational and individual levels provided an appropriate framework that allowed adjustment in the levels of authority delegated and ensured the responsibility and accountability of United Nations officials.

40. **Mr. Mirmohammad** (Islamic Republic of Iran), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, requested an explanation of the delay in issuance of the JIU report — which had been submitted in 2000 — and the comments thereon; had those documents been issued on time, the Committee could have considered them in the context of its discussions on human resources management.

41. The General Assembly had always emphasized that any delegation of authority should be carried out in accordance with the Charter and the rules and regulations of the Organization and should entail clear lines of authority and accountability. The Group of 77 and China attached particular importance to recommendation 2 (Clarity in the formulation of policies and procedures). It considered that recommendation 4 (Promulgation of revised Financial Regulations and Rules) should be broadened to include staff rules. He asked whether recommendation 6 (Promulgation of individual delegation orders) called for the delegation of additional authority to individuals or merely for compliance with guidelines whenever authority was delegated. With respect to recommendation 9 (Monitoring), the General Assembly had often emphasized that well-designed mechanisms of accountability, including internal monitoring and control procedures, must be put in place before authority was delegated to programme managers. Lastly, recommendation 11 rightly stressed the need to ensure that the views and suggestions of the staff were considered and that consultations with staff representatives were undertaken prior to the delegation of authority.

42. **Mr. Farid** (Saudi Arabia) said that he fully supported the statement made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

43. The delegation of authority should proceed according to a certain order. First, the views and suggestions of the staff should be considered (recommendation 11); then a comprehensive system of accountability should be developed, taking into account the need for adequate mechanisms to evaluate the performance of officials to whom authority was delegated and for performance indicators and enforcement mechanisms (recommendation 10); and, lastly, the delegation of authority to individuals should be clearly defined in individual delegation orders (recommendation 6).

44. **Mr. Nakkari** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that his delegation also supported the statement made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Recommendation 6, on the promulgation of individual delegation orders, addressed many of the concerns of the General Assembly, which had asked for a clear system of accountability to be established before authority was delegated. He did not share the view expressed by the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management that the current system of delegation of authority was balanced and adequate, and stressed the need for the views of staff on the matter to be taken into account.

45. **Mr. Repasch** (United States of America) said that the report of JIU highlighted what was perhaps a deficiency in the oversight process, namely, the length of time that elapsed between issuance of the report of JIU and issuance of the related report of the Secretary-General. During the interval, many of the findings and recommendations contained in the report of JIU might have been overtaken by events. The Committee, moreover, now had to deal with the sometimes conflicting information contained in the two reports. A more consultative process should therefore be followed, in which the comments of the Secretary-General were incorporated into the report. The Committee's task would then be limited to deciding

whether or not to endorse the common view expressed in the report.

46. **Mr. Abdalla** (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that the question of delegation of authority was an important but thorny subject, particularly for the Office of Human Resources Management. In his view, the various departments of the Secretariat currently lacked the capacity or logistical support to fully exercise authority. A multi-stage approach to the problem should therefore be adopted.

47. Human resources management was concerned mainly with rules and regulations and with legal interpretation and precedents. There was therefore also an urgent need to train both managers and support staff before management authority was delegated.

48. His delegation attached great importance to recommendation 11, on the need for full and meaningful consultations with staff representatives. Also important were the questions of the accountability of managers for the use and possible abuse of authority and the role of the Administration in general supervision and monitoring activities. Authority should be delegated not in a general but in a precise manner, with managers exercising authority within clearly defined limits.

49. **Mr. Münch** (Joint Inspection Unit), replying to the question posed by the delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran, said that recommendation 6 should be interpreted to mean that specific rules and procedures were to be observed in the delegation of management authority.

50. He agreed with the comments made by the representative of the United States of America concerning the unsatisfactory nature of the oversight process. It would have been better if the Secretary-General's comments had been provided within three months of the issuance of the report, as provided for in the statute of JIU. The issue of the oversight process, however, was a broader one that went beyond the scope of the reports under consideration.

51. He shared the views expressed by the representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya on the need for training for managers. Indeed, the Inspectors felt that the establishment in the Office of Human Resources Management of a type of "help-desk" function devoted to providing guidance on the correct implementation and interpretation of financial, staff and programme planning regulations, rules and administrative instructions would go a long way towards reinforcing managerial competencies and accountability.

52. **Ms. Salim** (Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management) said, with reference to recommendation 6, that the issue of the promulgation of individual delegation orders was concerned not with additional authority but with the clarification of authority and establishment of proper procedures to ensure absolute clarity about roles and responsibilities.

53. **Mr. Juppin De Fondaumiere** (Director of the Management Policy Office) said that the Secretariat had taken note of the concerns expressed by many delegations over the amount of time that had elapsed between the issuance of the report of JIU and the issuance of the related report of the Secretary-General. He regretted the delay, which had been due to the extensive consultations that had taken place during the preparation of the Secretary-General's report. Moreover, the report had been submitted to the Secretariat the previous October, at a time when many of the parties that were required to comment on its findings were busy with other matters of equally high priority. The Secretariat would do everything possible to speed up the process in the future.

54. **Mr. Repasch** (United States of America) said that his delegation was concerned not so much with whether the statute of JIU had been respected as with ways of enhancing the effectiveness of the inspection process by making it more consultative. The current process was simply not satisfactory.

55. **Mr. Abdalla** (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) asked which parties had been consulted by the Secretariat prior to the issuance of the Secretary-General's comments and whether staff representatives had been among those parties.

56. **Mr. Münch** (Joint Inspection Unit) said that observance of the statute of JIU was an important element of the work of the Unit. The statute's provisions governing standards and procedures for inquiries and investigations provided for the secretariat of an organization to make substantive comments on the Unit's investigations. The Unit welcomed such comments, which helped to make the overall review more comprehensive. Unfortunately, the comments received were sometimes superficial and even

contradictory. Moreover, the consultative process tended to delay the issuance of the report.

57. **Mr. Juppin De Fondaumiere** (Director of the Management Policy Office), replying to the question posed by the representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, said that the consultations he had referred to had taken place within the Secretariat.

*The meeting rose at 12.15 p.m.*